Church: A 'Very Real Possibility'

Did CIA Plot on Its Own?

By Norman Kempster
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Comparing the CIA to a "rogue elephant on a rampage," the chairman of the Senate Select Intelligence Committee said yesterday it is possible the agency planned assassinations without the knowledge or approval of Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower or John F. Kennedy.

After the committee questioned the final witness in its two-month-long investigation of CIA murder plots abroad, Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, said the evidence points to a "very real possibility" that the agency acted without White House approval.

Eisenhower's son, former Ambassador John Eisenhower, told reporters after testifying in the committee's closed hearing that if his father had heard of an assassination plan he would have rejected it with "contempt."

KENNEDY'S defense secretary, Robert S. McNamara, and national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, last week issued statements that Kennedy had never approved assassination as an instrument of foreign policy.

Church said earlier that although the committee has found "hard evidence" that the CIA engaged in assassination planning and in actual murder attempts, there was no clear evidence to link either Eisenhower or Kennedy to the plans.

But Church said yesterday the evidence may show the CIA acted without legal authority.

"We have to face the very real possibility that the agency may have been behaving like a rogue elephant on a rampage," Church said. "But rather than speculate on that, I think the evidence will have to speak for itself. When the committee issues its report, everyone will have an opportunity to review the evidence."

THE COMMITTEE plans to issue an interim report on assassinations later this month or early in August.

Asked if there was a possibility that assassinations were planned without the knowledge of the CIA director by lower-level agency employes, Chrurch said, "That can best be answered when you have a chance to review the evidence."

Former CIA Director John A. McCone told the committee earlier that he has found records of a plan to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro but he said he had not been informed ot the plot at the time. McCone said if he had known of the plan, he would have stopped it.

Church has said the committee is investigating assassination plots during a period running from the closing months of the Eisenhower administration until the early months of the Johnson administration.

Underworld figure John Roselli has told the committee of a Mafia-CIA plan to kill Castro during that period.

JOHN EISENHOWER, who was on his father's White House staff, said President Eisenhower's view of assassination was that "it is a rather poor way of running a business because you are going to make a martyr out of the other fellow if you do something like that and no man is indespensible. Now, maybe some would disagree that no man is indespensible but that certainly was his attitude."

"It's like the umpire says, it ain't nothing till I call it, and nothing came to the White House," Eisenhower said.

Former CIA Director Richard Helms also appeared before the Church committee yesterday but he refused to talk to reporters afterward.

Helms said earlier that the CIA only acts in response to the wishes of the White House.

Asked about Helms statement, John Eisenhower said his father was never alone with the CIA director "except for one short period of 10 minutes." During all other meetings with the CIA head, John Eisenhower said, the President was accompanied by aides unconnected with the agency.

ALTHOUGH the committee has not begun to write its report on assassinations, it already has begun to take testimony on the next phase of its inquiry — clandestine CIA attempts to manipulate events in other countries.

The first example of clandestine operations to be examined was the CIA effort to undermine the government of Marxist President Salvadore Allende of Chile. Allende died in a coup that overthrew his regime in 1973.

Church also said the committee plans to investigate illegal CIA mail opening. He said that probably will be a topic to be considered when the committee holds public hearings in the fall.

"You know, we have to put a stop to that," he said. "You know it is not only illegal, it is outrageous."

The Rockefeller Commission report said the CIA's mail-opening project was ended in 1973.